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THIS BOOK PRESENTED BY
Mrs. Charles Friesell





Sincerely yours,

De Long

"Shiloh Woods",
Pittsburg, Kansas,
Missouri

June 5 - 1920

Dear Oester Frierell:

It affords me much pleasure to autograph the copy of "The Spirits of the Trees" which I am forwarding under separate cover.

I deeply appreciate your kindly interest in the two little books, and trust that I may have the pleasure of seeing you in "Shiloh Woods" at some future time.

Sincerely yours,
Dr. H. E. Frierell,
Pittsburgh,
Jan 6-1920
Perry Waine
W. Long Rice

Sincerely yours,

De Long Rice

"Shiloh Woods",
Pittsburg Landing,
Tennessee

June 5 - 1920

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THE SPIRITS
of
THE TREES

By DELONG RICE

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DEDICATION

HOW wonderously the past has preserved the smallest and tenderest incidents of our lives, and stored them away in the shadowy cellars of our brains! How fragrant and mellow they grow in the mildewed flask of the years; and how gently retrospection lifts them to the lips of our minds, in the frosted glass of memory!

On a summer afternoon of many years ago, my mother said to me:

“When the vision flies out over earth, it would become weary, if it had nothing to obstruct it; so God planted the trees out yonder that our wandering eyes may pause, like the birds, and rest upon them.”

In memory of that long-gone hour, and in honor of that poetic conception of the trees, I dedicate this little volume to her.

—The Author.



WHO does not love the fadeless face and features of nature—the sun that smiles eternal light—the stars that twinkle through the ages—little springs that drink from the mist-veiled fountains of the sky—great rivers that rise and fall with the whims and tempers of the clouds—*old trees, still green with youth under their crowns of centuries?*

These, all, were here when we came; and they will be here, fresh and young, when we go away.

T H E S P I R I T S
of T H E T R E E S

DeLong Rice



T H O M A S C A R L Y L E

was the greatest prose writer who ever wrote; his greatest work is his "French Revolution"; and its most beautiful sentence takes a tree for its central figure:

"The oak grows silently in the forest, a thousand years; only in the thousandth year, when the woodman arrives with his axe, is there heard an echoing through the solitudes; and the oak announces itself when, with far-sounding crash, it *falls*."



TH E charm of this sentence lies in the fact that it tells so much more than it says—that is, to the mind that thinks, to the imagination that has wings. Its sud-



den melody blares out from the printed page like the music of an unseen band; it thrills and quivers through all the nerves of memory and, in the twinkling of an eye, serenades the deep hushes of every forest we have known; dashes our thoughts against the melancholy shores of silence, and makes us wonder at the wonder of an inanimate life that can endure a thousand speechless years.



WE SALUTE the poetic genius that can sweep the mind and melt the heart with the melodies of such a sentence; but we take issue with its philosophy. It is not noise alone that announces the purposes of men and things. When the stricken tree plunges downward in its fall, the groaning sigh which ~~is~~ heaves upon the air, is its expiring breath; its crash is



its death-cry, but it has announced itself through every hour of its thousand years. Have you not heard its first whisperings of the springtime; and did it not say: "Long before the dog star shall trot with the sun up and down the flaming zodiac of July, I will unfold these little buds into a broad, cool canopy, beneath which you may rest?" Have you not seen it mount the gray hills of September and signal the approach of Autumn with its many-colored banner? And when its fickle leaves have fled and surrendered its shade to the paling sun, have you not seen it with great bare limbs, prepare to resist the long seige of winter? Softly it trumpets in its scattered army of strength and vitality from all its outposts of branch and twig; silently sails them down its tiny rivers of sap, to their warm quarters in the ground; and, while all



its substances sleep safely within,
its rough bark armor meets the
harmless missiles of sleet and snow.



WHOEVER has enjoyed the
intimate companionship of
trees in their native haunts, must
have learned that, aside from their
ornamental beauty, they possess
many traits of character before
which men should bow in reverence
and respect. Clean as the atmos-
phere on which their heads are
pillowed, they are aristocratic in
their conduct and pure in their
generations. No half-breeds rise
to plague the lines of forest families
—no Othellos and Desdemonas to
violate the laws of the timber races
—polygamous, perhaps, as were
the ancient patriarchs, but true to
their kind and species. When the
virtuous woods dames gather
round the peaceful table land to



tell their winter tales and knit the many-figured embroideries of their summer robes, there are no whispered scandals to mar their happy discourse, no jealousies to turn their green to a greener hue. There are no chestnut children with cedar heads, no hickory-walnuts nor poplar-oaks, no mulatto saplings to proclaim the secret sins of the fair-skinned beech and the black-gum wench.



THE TRUSTING grapevine, so graceful and so tender, may clasp her arms about the great oak's form for a hundred years, and feel no amorous impulse burning in the wine-fraught tides of her fragrant blood. It is the passionless leaning of neighbor on neighbor. O, that weak-willed men could emulate these noble traits! But alas, observation, the great teacher, tells us that the vine and the oak



are as near to flesh and blood as may be trusted within the dangerous bonds of Platonic friendship.



THAT THERE is something in trees that makes them strive to live and prosper, is as evident as is the same quality in us. On the steepest hillside, a healthy tree will ignore the stooping landscape, and grow straight toward the zenith. With a wound they are as careful as we, and in time the hurt heals and becomes a scar, just as it would on you or me. Whether or not these are conscious qualities, we may never know, but it is not preposterous to say that God who gave to the meanest worm a sense of its existence, and to the most loathsome insect a consciousness of its being, may have blown into these grand creations of His wis-



dom, delicate and gentle souls. As they gather the rings of centuries in their trunks, they may, perchance, laugh at the comedies and weep with the tragedies of men and nations. When they balm the air with sweet perfumes or shower upon us their libations of fruits and nuts, for aught we know, conscience pays to them the precious coin of the blessedness of giving; or when we protect them from threatening danger, through their fibrous hearts may run the quick response of gratitude, and a wordless speech of thanks may tremble on their soundless lips.



IN this brief sketch we shall not meet all the multitude of trees which make the forest the chief glory of nature. We shall but tarry for a few minutes with the beloved few which have seemed like



members of our families—the companions of other days. How easily does damp-eyed memory lead them forth in their old familiar garbs, and what a troop of hallowed yesterdays come back to us with them!



FOREMOST in the line we see the white-bodied beech of level valleys and loose-soiled hills, inviting the keen blade of the autographing knife; enduring parchment of the wilderness whereon the adventurer and the woodsman long ago cut their rugged seals; where once fond lovers have carved on the wide, smooth bark a homely heart, and in it joined their names, to stand together against the seasons' varying storms, as they, perchance, have met and shared the sterner storms of life.



THERE is the freckled sycamore, comely, fruitless drone, loitering the years away on the margin of cool waters, close-lipped and trusted witness of all our boyish crimes of the pin hook and the swimming hole.



CHANGELESS in the rigors of the changing seasons, the sighing cedar pitches its peaked tent of green on the lonesome, limestone slopes, nursing from the breast of the earth and the bosom of the air, the antidotes of decay, storing in its firm, red heart, the endurance of ages, and waiting for a destiny as uncertain as the fortunes of men; to be, perhaps, a lowly fence post and guard the bounty of rich fields; to sentinel the railroad's clamorous track, and hold aloft far-stretching wires t h a t t h r o b with human thoughts; to be fashioned into



graceful chests which may, perchance, embrace the scented robes of some proud queen, and keep away the little moth which is the silver tooth of time.



RISING NOBLY to meet the view, is the mighty chestnut, his name unkindly made the synonym of feeble jokes and toothless tales. This master tree has played with us a master part. How fond the recollection of his long, slender blossoms, forerunners of his sweet brown harvest! What a military despot is he in the fulfillment of his destiny! Around each little nut-filled burr he throws a cordon of bristling bayonets, to guard their growth and ripening; but when the chill night winds whisper to him that their work is done, how like a profligate prince he commands each swinging fort to throw



open its daggered gates, and cast its glossy stores to every begging breeze! When new fields are cleared, he surrenders his body, and stretches his riven rails in zigzag fences, around the crops of patches and plantations; he passes through fire to fill the charcoal bin, and warm the breath of the anvil's song.



WE find the firm old hickory, which seldom comes near the house, dwelling like a hermit, where the shadows lie deepest, canning kernels to be opened in the firelight glow of long winter evenings, petting the squirrels, and filling their gnarled cupboards for the coming days of famine. Sometimes in the fullness of his quiet glory, fate smites him and takes him away to groan in the axles of toiling wagons, to whirl in the glittering wheels of gay carriages and



to become the trusted handles of all the tools and implements of industry; and then the story is whispered through the forest aisles, that in the hour of his death, he has turned traitor to his fellow trees, and willed his finest timbers to the murderous axe, most ancient enemy of the woods.



BEHOLD AGAIN the slender, graceful pine, wild sorceress of healing balms, bowing to every wandering blast; fair flirt and lurking Carmen among the woodland belles, yielding to the tempest's passionate arms to waltz and tango and turkey-trot to the music of thunder's rolling drums!



WONDER looms the iron-sinewed oak, which poets love to call the royal tree; but whose life and habits scorn the proffered



crown, since he is the democrat of the timber world, associating in perfect equality with the meanest and the most noble trees. He neighbors with the low-born sour wood and all the thicket scrubs that squat about his feet. Then, waving his thousand acorn caps, he locks arms with the stately poplar when summer weaves honeyed blossoms in her glistening bodice, and leads her in the sylvan minuet.



THERE are so many of these old friends we have not time to dwell upon—the wide-brimmed maple with bleeding veins of liquid sugar—the motherly walnut that yearly spreads her feast and leaves the brown stain of her kisses upon little lips and little hands—the humble persimmon, conspiring with boys and dogs, holding up its copper-colored clusters to toll the poor



'possum to his doom—the timid little dogwood, never loved nor noticed except when she dresses in white to celebrate the springtime—and all the tribes and families of those old embowering orchards that shall forever blossom among the fairest phantoms of recollected things.

Great trees, like great men, must live on in service after death, some to sweeten memory with flowers and fruits that vanished with our better years, others to know more serious duties in the march of human life. The whirling saw that parts the fallen bodies of the oak and the pine, sings to them a song of immortality, and sends their timbers of strength and beauty to while away the centuries in the fairest abodes of men—to wall and shelter happy homes; to be a table in a house of plenty; to be a chair beloved



of weary beauty; to be a fiddle and carry the soul of melody; to be a desk and hear a poet's thoughts.



BUT there is a nameless tree, the most sacred and beautiful that waves from the green landscape of memory—nameless because it is not the same with us all. It may be an oak, a poplar, a chestnut, an apple tree, or any of the others; it is the tree that stood at the door of the old home. Our childish feet passed in and out beneath its boughs; it gave welcome asylum to sweet songsters that dwelt with us in poverty or in wealth; it spread its shadows for our plays and pranks, and for our lazy dream-filled hours. On sultry summer evenings it lent its soft eclipse to the romance of many a sweetheart pair, invited in ten



thousand katydids to drown the murmur of their plighting troth, and gently turned away the golden glances of the prying moon. It seemed to dance with every joy that blessed the home, and droop with every grief that hovered there—to mark the tripping footsteps of every blushing bride who went forth through the half-sad mists of a mother's smiling tears—to shrink and weep when death's black pinions bore away some loved and silent form.



WHEN ambition bugled to us his clear, keen notes from afar, and we broke the home ties and obeyed his call, the shaggy top of this great tree was the last to nod adieu as we cast back our parting glance. While we struggled through the years, how patiently he watched with the old folks for



our return; and when at last our homeward footsteps crested the hill and turned into the dusty lane, his unchanging silhouette against the sky was the first to bid us welcome.

We have wandered too far to return again, but we salute thee, across the valley of the years, sweet spirit of the nameless tree.





